

CLAIMS

1. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment, the air cushion fabricated of two sheets of heat sealable thermoplastic material secured together by heat sealed seams, and comprising:

- a. an inflatable tube having a closed or substantially closed configuration, the inflatable tube in part defined by an inside seam;
- b. two facing product support panels extending from the inside seam of the inflatable tube; and
- c. the product support panels providing a product placement area for receiving and holding a product suspended on the product support panels and substantially surrounded by the inflatable tube.

2. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 1, wherein the inflatable tube has a continuous, closed configuration.

3. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 2, wherein the inflatable tube has a generally rectangular configuration.

4. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 1, the air cushion having a U-shaped configuration wherein the distal ends of the legs of the U-shaped inflatable tube are foldable to substantially surround a product in the product placement area.

5. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claims 1-4, wherein one of the product support panels is slit to define an opening, and the product placement area is defined between the product support panels and accessible for inserting and removing a product through the opening.

6. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 5, wherein the product support panels are joined by the seams to provide multiple product placement areas, and at least one of the product support panels in some of the product placement areas being provided with a slit defining an opening for inserting and removing a product.

7. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 6, wherein the product support panels are joined by one or more seams to define one or more product placement areas closely accommodating the shapes of one or more particular products.

8. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claims 1-7, and further comprising the plurality of stacking height extension legs extending from the inflatable tube at an outside seam thereof and foldable to overlie or underlie the inflatable tube.

9. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 8, wherein the stacking height extension legs are sized to provide a thickness of approximately the same dimension as the diameter of the inflatable tube.

10. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claim 9, wherein the stacking height extension legs have a stacking height greater than the diameter of the inflatable tube, and are provided with medial discontinuous seams limiting the thickness of the stacking height extension legs to approximately the same dimension as the diameter of the inflation tube.

11. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claims 1-10, wherein the sheets of heat sealable thermoplastic material incorporate a conductive layer, whereby a product received in a product placement area between the product support panels is shielded from electromagnetic fields.

12. An air cushion for protecting products during shipment as defined in claims 1-11 and further comprising a carton for receiving the air cushion and product, the air cushion and carton sized and dimensioned such that the air cushion is supported against the sides, top and bottom of the carton and the product is suspended and substantially surrounded by the inflatable tube within the carton.

13. A packaging system as defined in claim 11 wherein the inflatable cushion is made of two sheets of substantially air impervious material, the surface of one sheet having a higher co-efficient of friction than the surface of the other sheet so that the surface with the higher co-efficient of friction grips the product to hold the air cushion in position and the sheet with the lower co-efficient of friction facilitates sliding the product and air cushion into the carton.

14. A packaging system for a product having a peripheral wall, a top and a bottom, the packaging system comprising:

- a. a generally rectangular carton dimensioned to receive the product with clearance around the peripheral wall of the product;
- b. an air cushion having inflatable tube sized for contacting and engaging the walls of the carton when inflated and placed therein, a valve for inflating the inflatable tube; and
- c. the air cushion having a product placement area defined by two facing product support panels integral with and extending from the inflatable tube, wherein the product support panels are adapted to support a product in the product placement area and provide air cushioned separation between the product and at least some walls of the carton, thereby stabilizing and cushioning the product therein.

15. A packaging system as defined in claim 14 wherein the inflatable tube fully surrounds a peripheral sidewall of the product.

16. A packaging system as defined in claims 14-15 wherein at least one of the product support panels defines an opening for inserting a product into the product placement area which is between the product support panels.

17. A packaging system as defined in claim 14 wherein the inflatable cushion is made of two sheets of substantially air impervious material, the surface of one sheet having a higher co-efficient of friction than the surface of the other sheet so that the surface with the higher co-efficient of friction grips the product to hold the air cushion in position and the sheet with the lower co-efficient of friction facilitates sliding the product and air cushion into the carton.